



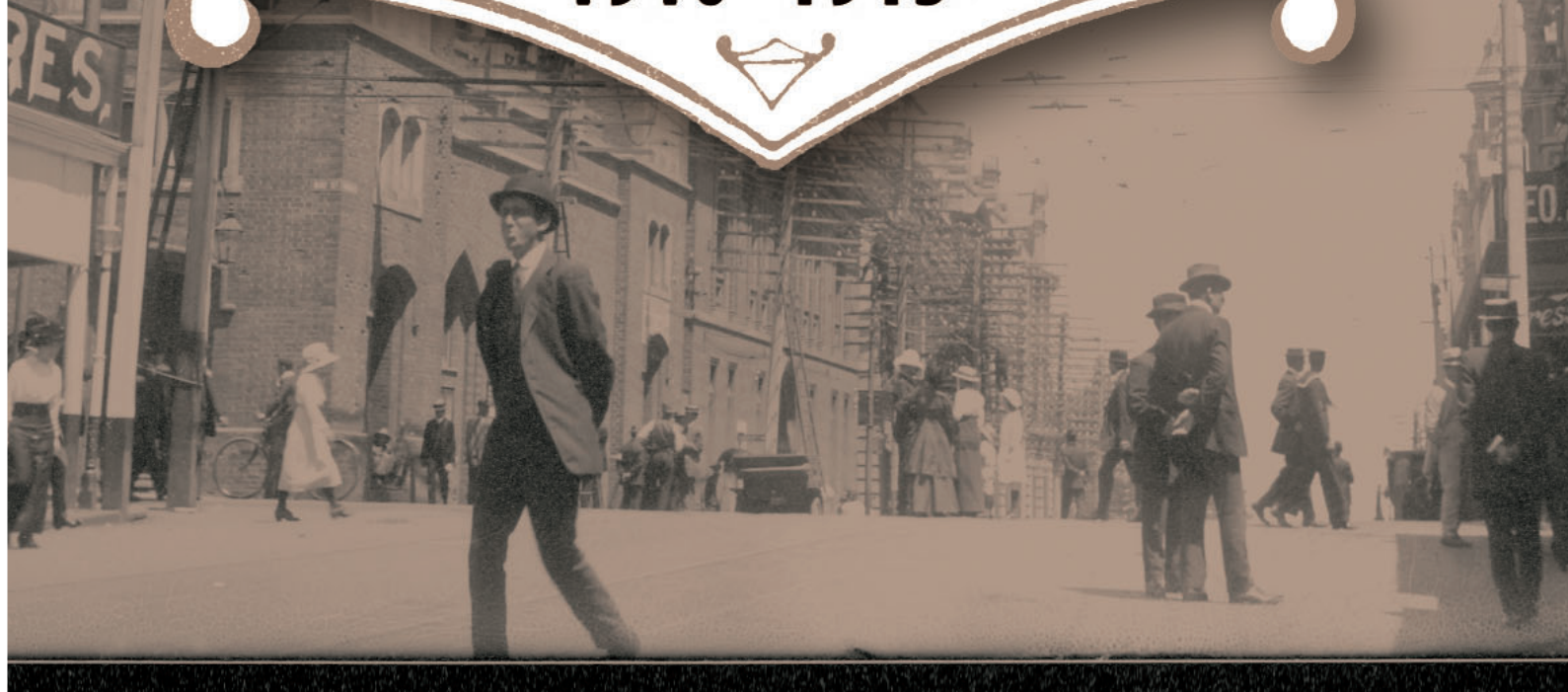
CITY of PERTH

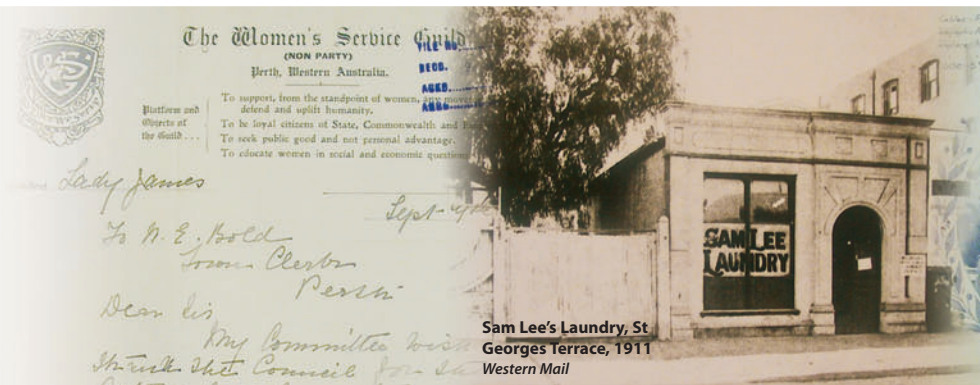
PERTH TOWN HALL

13 AUGUST–6 SEPTEMBER 2009

**NIGHTSOIL
HATPINS AND
HEALTH INSPECTORS**

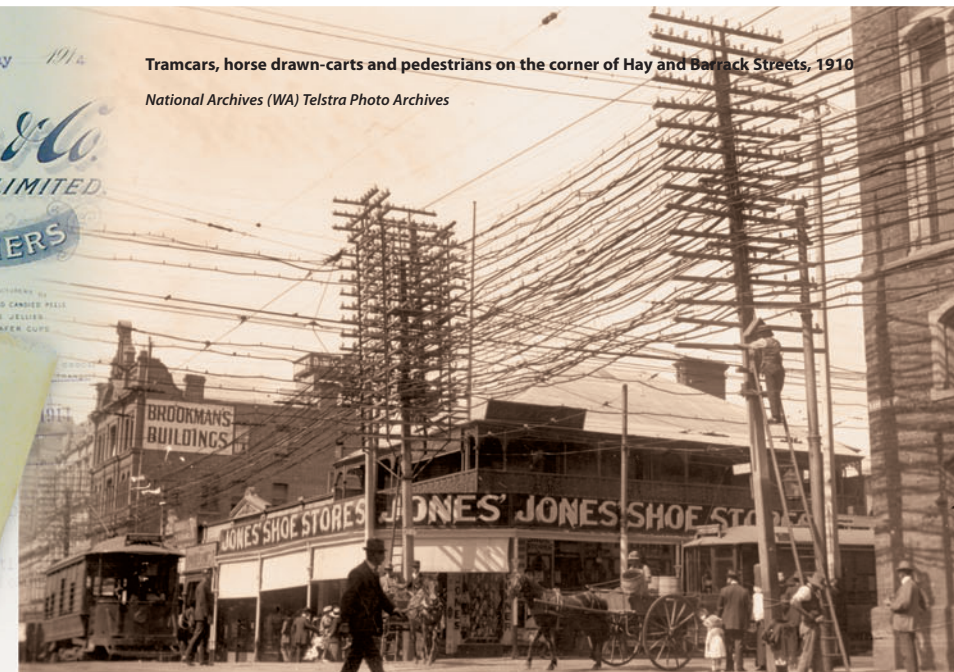
Cleaning Up the
CITY OF PERTH
1910–1915





Sam Lee's Laundry, St Georges terrace, 1911
Western Mail

Hatpin, c1911



Tramcars, horse drawn-carts and pedestrians on the corner of Hay and Barrack Streets, 1910
National Archives (WA) Telstra Photo Archives

The years 1910 to 1915 were transformative years for the city of Perth. The Perth City Council was instrumental in making changes that laid the foundations of a modern city. The 'gold rush' of the 1890s brought about an increase in the population of Western Australia. By 1915 the population of metropolitan Perth was 124,306.

Despite traditional ties to England and the Empire there was a strong desire for Australia to become a modern society in its own right. 1910 marked the year the Australian Treasury replaced the British Pound with Australian currency and the Labor Party won power nationally for the first time. A year later the Scaddan Labor Government came to power in Western Australia (1911–1916).

Perth had 4 Mayors during this period: RP Vincent (1909–1910), TGA Molloy (1910–1912), JH Prowse (1912–1914) and J Nicholson (1914–1915).

The development of modern planning, and the concept of 'amenity', with its beginnings in the Victorian cities of England was driven by the need for better standards of housing and sanitation for the general population. The protection of public health, a growing respect for the rights of the individual and the responsibility of society in relation to those individuals led to this change.

In 1911, Councillors William Hardwick and Harold Boas with WE Bold, the Town Clerk, began to raise awareness of planning issues for Perth. A Town Planning Conference was held in 1913. The Town Clerk embarked on a world trip in 1914 gathering information on town planning issues. On his return he wrote a report which became the basis of a Town Planning Act presented to parliament later that year. The Act was finally declared in 1928.

In 1914 the Greater Perth Council was formed – the consolidation of Perth Council with Leederville and North Perth Councils. Uniform sanitary and health rates were applied as well as practical standards for health and housing. It was the responsibility of Council Health Inspectors to monitor the condition of all food supplies in the city, supervise infectious diseases, inspect hotels and coffee palaces and grant applications for boarding houses and private maternity hospitals.

The notion of 'amenity' in 1910–1915 was a challenging concept. The Council struggled to cope with new ideas about women's freedom; the dilemma of prostitution; rights for the non-European population and the 'aesthetic look' of the city.

A number of women's organisations were very active in this period. A persistent campaign by women's groups resulted in a public lavatory being provided for the use of women and children at the Perth Town Hall in late 1910, enabling women to be able to visit the city and more easily participate in civil life.

Councillors were all men in this period. The concerns of women and the concern about women seemed concurrent. For instance, The Town Clerk in 1913 was so worried about the danger of women's hatpins that he enacted a by law to protect the public by restricting the length of 'unguarded' hatpins. In the same year, the Perth City Council finally agreed to a Women's Service Guild request that the Council support women in gaining the right to stand for Municipal Office.

Little consideration of 'amenity' was afforded the Indigenous Nyungar people, the traditional owners of the land around Perth. By 1910 the Indigenous population was relocated to the margins of the city and onto reserves and missions. They had little access to traditional fishing grounds and food harvesting areas and European settlement had built on many of the most important sites of Indigenous habitation and significance. Limited acknowledgement of Nyungar culture and people would continue into the next century.

At this time there were also issues involving the Chinese population. Concerns over labour (the Factories Act of 1904), especially Chinese laundries and furniture-making factories, meant Chinese laundries had restricted working hours and were forced to pay registration fees twice that of European counterparts. In 1911, due to lobbying by The Australian Natives' Association (ANA), the Council restricted licences for Chinese laundries. The ANA also lobbied Council to purchase all Chinese gardens throughout the

city and by 1914 a number of gardens purchased by the Council were developed into parks.

The idea of 'amenity' expanded however, to allow the Council to support many leisure activities such as renting out the Perth Town Hall for picture shows, horticultural displays, vaudeville performers and visiting speakers. The Perth Oval was available for football clubs and new public swimming baths were opened in 1914 at Crawley.

At this time, Empire Day (24 May) was organised by the Perth City Council who brought, by free tram transport, all school children from metropolitan schools into the city to celebrate Australia's traditional tie to Britain. After a parade on the Esplanade the children were provided with entertainment and bags of boiled lollies.

Commonwealth authorities in conjunction with the Council removed the many over-head telegraph poles that so dominated streetscapes. Lines were laid underground.



Perhaps most importantly, basic sanitation was improved when sewerage pipes were laid to connect privies to large-scale main drains. In 1910 sewage did not just disappear down the toilet! Closets in houses and businesses used tarred metal pans, which were emptied twice weekly. Seventy tons of 'nightsoil' was collected each night by Council 'Pan-Lifters' – men who hoisted the pans onto their shoulders and carried them to waiting horses and carts. Sewage was taken to an area about 3.5 miles from Perth where it was ploughed into the sandy soil.

For many years previously, with each outbreak of Typhoid, there had been calls by Perth doctors for the State Government to build an alternative sewerage system. Finally work began in 1910 to build the underground sewerage drains that still operate today. Over the next five years all houses and businesses were encouraged to connect to the 'Ministers Drain' as it was called. However, while the number of

infectious cases dropped significantly, the new sewage treatment works ran into difficulties. Filter beds often overflowed and effluent pipes were discharged directly into the Swan River. The river often stank and many petitions were presented to the Perth City Council concerning the pollution of the river. The Council agitated on behalf of its residents but pleas for help from the Government were unsuccessful. It took many years before the matter was resolved.

Major changes took place in the areas of transport. In 1913 Prime Minister Fisher turned the first sod of the Transcontinental Railway line in Kalgoorlie, which would ultimately connect WA with the other capital cities. Before 1910 the streets of Perth were dirt and were watered at night in an effort to reduce the dust. In 1910 the Perth City Council began to use tar on the roads and by 1915, 133 miles of street had been macadamised. During this time there was a huge growth in the use of motor vehicles and a corresponding drop in the use of horses. The trams, taken over by the State Government in 1913, could not cope with the city's transport needs and motor-buses were introduced.

In 1910 Perth was lit by gas lamps, kerosene lamps and just 7 electric street lamps. Electricity for lighting private residences was yet to be introduced.

After a protracted battle, in 1912, the Perth City Council assumed control of the Perth Gas and Electricity Company. Demand for electricity grew rapidly and the Council was faced with the need to provide a new generating station. The Premier and the Mayor entered into an agreement to build the East Perth Power Station. A ring of electric cable was laid underground around the city and steel poles were erected to carry the electricity. The Power Station, delayed by World War I, began operation in December 1916.

1914 saw the outbreak of World War I. By November 1915 few families in Perth were not without a member fighting for 'King and Country'. Many Council staff were called away to serve in the war and the Mayor and Councillors became heavily involved in raising relief funds.



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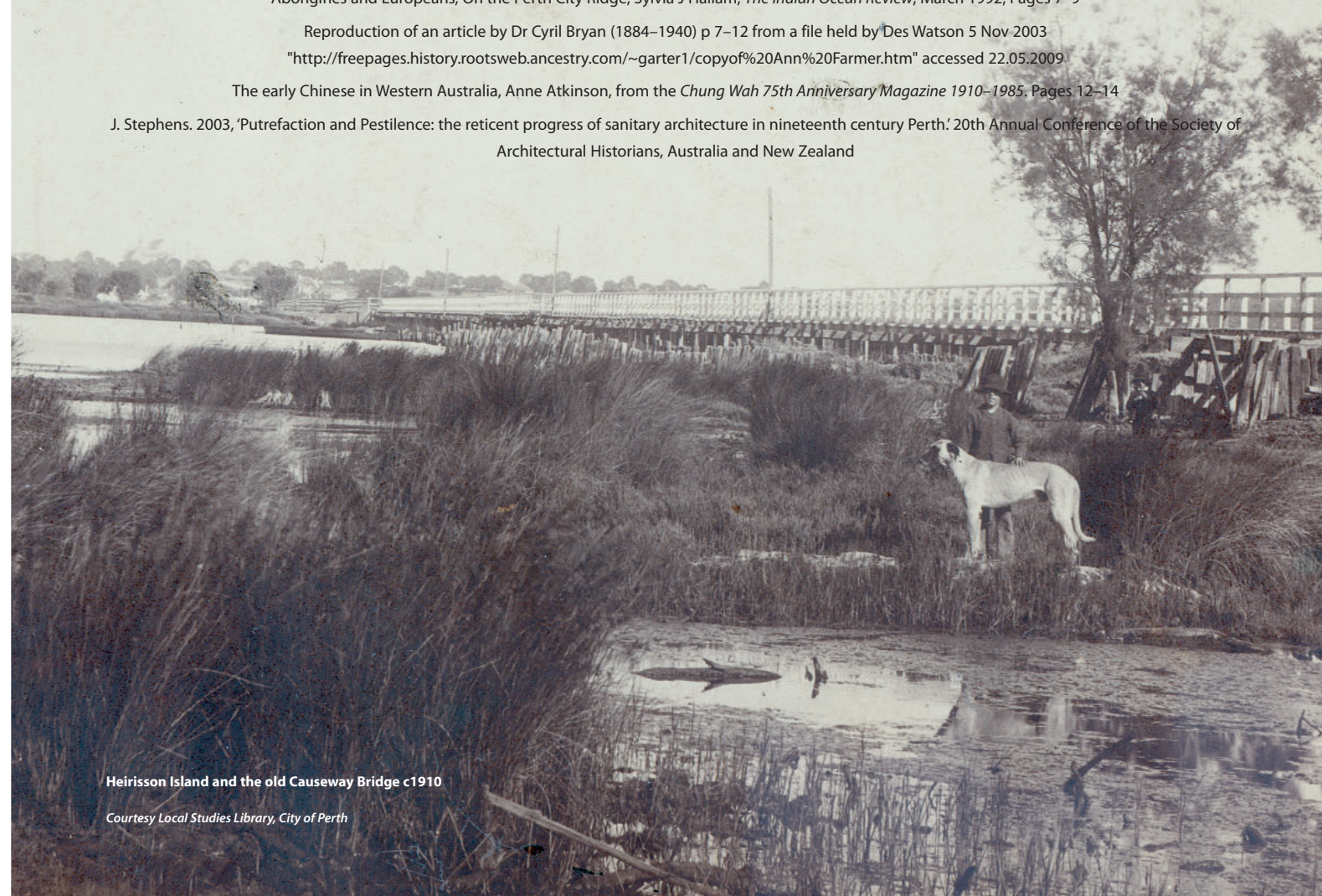
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Heirisson Island and the old Causeway Bridge c1910

Courtesy Local Studies Library, City of Perth